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Associated Press

John Clark Donahue after he posted \$150,000 bond on April 18.

Donahue was topic of rumors for many years

By Randy Furst and Paul McKean Staff Writers

For more than a decade there had been rumors.

But John Clark Donahue dismissed them and he was believed.

Hours after Donahue was charged with sexually abusing boys at the Children's Theatre he founded, the district theater producer, A.L. Fennell, said: "We never accused John. He was there before us. We came to him. He never came to us."

Two images of Donahue emerged over the years.

One was that of a theater artistic director of rising national stature.

The other was that of a man who was the object of growing carrier group abuse about incidents toward boys at his theater.

The rumors had spread enough by 1979 that Minneapolis police investigated them, but turned up no evidence.

This is a story about that second image: who knew about it, when they found out about it, what they did — or did not — do about it.

The second image became public at 1:30 p.m. on April 18, when agents from the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) went to the theater at 1400 3rd Ave. S. to arrest and charge the 49-year-old Minneapolis native with sexually abusing three boys in his Victorian home and theater office.

With the charges, his past, which had never been seriously examined, was revealed: In 1961, while teaching at a junior high school in

Inside/

- Donahue's trouble cast doubt upon the financial stability of the Children's Theatre Company. Page 7A.
- A profile of the talented and charismatic driving force behind the success of CTC. Page 8A.
- How Minnesota therapists discuss the sort of sexual offenses alleged in the charges against Donahue. Page 11A.

additionally, Donahue had been arrested and charged with sex involving a boy. He had been implicated in an alleged homosexual sex ring involving three other adults and juveniles.

The BCA began investigating Donahue in 1981 and told the theater board that it was doing so in 1982. Board members discussed the matter for "about 30 seconds," said member Martin Reed. Donahue told them there was "no problem," Fennell said, and the board did nothing more.

The BCA did not turn up any significant information until last February, but after that the case moved quickly. Here are some of the allegations contained in BCA documents filed against Donahue.

- He forced male students in his office to watch him masturbate, while watching productions, engaged them in a variety of sexual acts.
- He encouraged adolescents to join him in drinking sessions and then sexually molested them.

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